

Modeling Groundwater Flow and Transport of Radionuclides at Amchitka Island's Underground Nuclear Tests: Milrow, Long Shot, and Cannikin

prepared by

Ahmed Hassan, Karl Pohlmann and Jenny Chapman

submitted to

Nevada Operations Office
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy

OCTOBER 2002

Publication No. 45172



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NOV 15 2002

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The work upon which this report is based was supported by the U.S. Department of Energy under Contract #DE-AC08-95NV11508. Approved for public release, further dissemination unlimited.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The groundwater flow and radionuclide transport at the Amchitka Island underground nuclear tests are modeled using two-dimensional numerical simulations. A multi-parameter uncertainty analysis is adapted and used to address the effects of the uncertainties associated with the definition of the modeled processes and the values of the parameters governing these processes. The nuclear tests performed at Milrow, Long Shot and Cannikin are the focus of this investigation. These tests were detonated on October 2, 1969, October 29, 1965, and November 6, 1971, respectively. The announced yield of these test are approximately one megaton for Milrow, 80 kilotons for Long Shot and less than five megatons for Cannikin.

The flow model is conceptualized to address the problem of density-driven flow where the saltwater intrusion problem is encountered. The multi-parameter uncertainty analysis addresses the effects of the uncertainty associated with four of the parameters governing these processes on the resulting solution. These parameters are the hydraulic conductivity, recharge, fracture porosity and macrodispersivity. The heat-driven flow and three-dimensional flow features are addressed in a less rigorous manner via a sensitivity analysis. This includes the geothermal heat, the shot-induced heat effects, the chimney geometry, the effects of nearby faults and the effect of the island half-width. All the simulations presented in this report, as well as the sensitivity analyses, are performed using the FEFLOW model of the WASY Institute for Water Resources Planning and Systems Research Ltd.

The conceptual transport model simulates many processes in addition to the advection-dispersion process. The release mechanism and glass dissolution, sorption effects, matrix diffusion and radioactive decay are among the processes modeled. The parametric uncertainty analysis also extends to three of the transport parameters governing the glass dissolution process, the matrix diffusion process and local scale dispersion. The solution of the transport problem is performed using a numerical particle-tracking algorithm and a semi-analytical solution is used for the matrix diffusion studies.

Hydraulic conductivity data collected from six boreholes are analyzed to yield a best estimate for the homogeneous conductivity value and the range of uncertainty associated with this estimate. Temperature logs measured in several of the boreholes on the island are used to estimate groundwater recharge. Measurements of total porosity were made on numerous core samples obtained from four boreholes. There are no measurements for fracture porosity, and therefore, values for this parameter are selected based on reported values from the literature.

Batch sorption experiments were performed using cores collected from the Cannikin emplacement well. Sorption on both basalt and breccia was investigated for strontium, cesium, and lead dissolved in water of basically seawater composition. The high ionic strength of the solution and rock properties resulted in no significant sorption for any ion except lead. The resulting distribution coefficient for lead was used to obtain a surface-based sorption constant for retardation of strongly sorbing radionuclides in fractures. Effective diffusion coefficients were also determined

for the cores and used to determine the matrix diffusion parameter controlling mass transfer from high-velocity fracture flowpaths into the surrounding matrix. This parameter is also dependent on the fracture half-aperture, estimated as 5×10^{-4} m from literature values.

A detailed preliminary uncertainty analysis is performed for Milrow to evaluate the impact of uncertainties of individual parameters on transport results. The numerical model is individually calibrated for each test site using site-specific chloride concentration and head data. After calibration, the Milrow configuration is used to perform a parametric uncertainty analysis, where we vary one parameter at a time and evaluate the effects of this change on the results of the transport solutions. This analysis resulted in reducing the list of uncertain parameters to only three significant parameters (recharge, conductivity and porosity) and fixing the rest of the parameters at their best estimate.

The final modeling stage performed for all three shots utilized multiple realizations of the flow field generated by considering random combinations of recharge, conductivity and porosity drawn at random from their respective distributions. All transport parameters were fixed at their best estimate. The ensemble of transport solutions is then analyzed in terms of the mass arrival to the seafloor, the first arrival time and the location and time where peak fluxes and concentrations occur. An additional sensitivity case is also presented for addressing the effect of changing the strength of the matrix diffusion process.

Transport results indicated that the radionuclide movement at Long Shot is much faster than at Milrow and Cannikin. That is due to the location of the cavity being very shallow as compared to the other two tests. The arrival time of the peaks of mass flux and concentration for tritium is in the order of 20 to 30 years for Long Shot and 100 to 125 years for Milrow and Cannikin. This led to higher mass fluxes and concentrations breaking through at Long Shot than at Cannikin or Milrow with the difference depending on the radionuclide's half-life.

In addition to the three uncertain parameters considered (recharge, conductivity and fracture porosity), the results are also very sensitive to the parameters affecting the diffusion of radionuclides into the rock matrix. This sensitivity is greater for radionuclides with short half-lives. Uncertainties primarily in determining the fracture aperture lead to great uncertainty in the matrix diffusion strength. In addition, the semi-analytical solution employed for addressing the matrix diffusion process is based on many simplifying assumptions that are not necessarily satisfied in the field.

A variety of sensitivity studies are presented. With the exception of evaluating matrix diffusion, the alternate scenarios are performed on several realizations selected to be representative of the gamut of flow behavior. As a result, the sensitivity results are not directly comparable to the Monte Carlo results, but do allow identification of the general magnitude of impact that process uncertainty contributes. A variety of numerical solution issues, matrix diffusion, colloid transport, uncertainty in island half-width, sea level changes, and geothermal processes are evaluated using the two-dimensional models. The impact of the two-dimensional simplification, flow in the rubble chimney, Cannikin Lake nuclear heat and flow in fault zones are all evaluated with three-dimensional models.

The presence of the nuclear chimney, with its high vertical conductivity, is found to dominate many of the other conceptualizations (the chimneys are included in the base-case Monte-Carlo calculations). Numerical solution issues, sea level changes, geothermal processes, the two-dimensional simplification, Cannikin Lake, and fault zones all have relatively limited impact on transport results for the realizations analyzed, or result in significantly less transport than the base case. Matrix diffusion, colloid transport, island half-width, and nuclear heat are potentially more significant. The results of the risk assessment will determine whether the uncertainties identified here are of potential significance or can be tolerated within an acceptable margin of safety.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank a number of technical reviewers whose comments improved the draft version of this report. This includes Greg Pohll, Roko Andricevic, and Craig Shirley of DRI; the members of the modeling subcommittee of the Underground Test Area Technical Working Group (Andrew Tompson, David Prudic, Rick Waddell, Andrew Wolfsberg, and Vefa Yucel); the Alaska Department of Conservation; and Bruce Crow of Los Alamos National Laboratory. Greg Pohll is also thanked for his valuable contributions to the temperature log analysis for recharge and glass dissolution function. We appreciate Craig Shirley's evaluation of geophysical logs early in the project. We are grateful to Todd Mihevc for the analysis of the many hydraulic tests and for obtaining the core samples and geophysical logs. The experimental sorption and diffusion work of Nicole Brown and Charalambos Papelis is a key contribution to this project and is gratefully acknowledged. Their work was made possible by the core material stored and provided by the U.S. Geological Survey Core Library in Mercury Nevada, which also shared geophysical logs. The authors also appreciate the contributions of David Benson and Bill Hu to this project in its early stages. Many thanks go to Debi Noack for her highly skillful electronic publishing support. Marjory Jones provided editorial support. Funding was provided by the U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, Nevada Operations Office and we are pleased to acknowledge the contributions to this work from Monica Sanchez, Michael Giblin, and Frank Maxwell.

PUBLICATIONS RESULTING FROM THIS WORK

- Hassan, A., K. Pohlmann, and J. Chapman, 2001. Uncertainty Analysis of Radionuclide Transport in a Fractured Coastal Aquifer with Geothermal Effects. *Transport in Porous Media* 43:107-136.
- Pohlmann, K., A. Hassan, and J. Chapman, 2002. Modeling Density-Driven Flow and Radionuclide Transport at an Underground Nuclear Test: Uncertainty Analysis and Effect of Parameter Correlation. *Water Resources Research*, 38(5), 10.1029/2001WR001047, pp. 17-1 to 17-18.
- Chapman, J., A. Hassan, K. Pohlmann, 2002. Resolving Discrepancies Between Hydraulic and Chemical Calibration Data for Seawater Intrusion Groundwater Flow Models by Considering Climate-Driven Sea Level Change. In Sherif, M.M., V.P. Singh, and M. Al-Rashed (eds.), *Environmental and Groundwater Pollution, Volume 3*, A.A. Balkema Publishers, Lisse, The Netherlands, pp. 379-397.
- Hassan, A., J. Chapman, and K. Pohlmann, in press. Uncertainty Analysis of Seawater Intrusion and Implications for Radionuclide Transport at the Amchitka Island's Underground Nuclear Tests. In Chang, A. and D. Ouazar (eds.), *Coastal Aquifer Management - Monitoring, Modeling, and Case Studies*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
PUBLICATIONS RESULTING FROM THIS WORK.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
LIST OF ACRONYMS	xviii
LIST OF SYMBOLS	xix
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Purpose and Organization	1
1.2 Previous Work	2
1.3 General Description of Amchitka Island	3
1.4 Description of the Underground Nuclear Test Sites	6
1.4.1 Milrow	6
1.4.2 Long Shot	8
1.4.3 Cannikin	10
1.5 Geology of Amchitka Island	11
1.5.1 Lithology/Depositional History of Amchitka Island	12
1.5.2 Lithology Specific to the Testing Areas	15
1.5.3 General Structure of Amchitka Island	18
1.5.4 Structure Specific to the Testing Areas	19
1.6 Hydrogeology	20
1.7 Hydrochemistry	23
2. CONCEPTUAL FLOW MODEL, PARAMETERS, AND CALIBRATION.....	29
2.1 Model Components and Assumptions	29
2.1.1 Island Hydraulics	29
2.1.2 Steady-state Assumption	30
2.1.3 Isothermal Conditions	31
2.1.4 Dual-porosity System	31
2.1.5 Homogeneity of Hydraulic Properties with Vertical Anisotropy	32
2.1.5.1 Vertical Anisotropy	34
2.1.6 Limited Impact of the Nuclear Tests on the Island Flow Field	35
2.1.7 Alternate Conceptual Flow Models	36
2.2 Flow Model Parameters and Supporting Data	38
2.2.1 Hydraulic Conductivity	38
2.2.2 Hydraulic Head	41
2.2.3 Porosity	43
2.2.4 Recharge	45
2.2.5 Water Chemistry Data	50
2.3 Numerical Modeling Strategy	50
2.3.1 Modeling Approach	51
2.3.2 Code Selection	53

2.4 Flow Model Calibration	55
2.4.1 Milrow Calibration and Base-case Parameters	56
2.4.2 Long Shot Calibration and Base-case Parameters	66
2.4.3 Cannikin Calibration and Base-case Parameters	68
2.4.4 Summary of Calibration Results	69
3. CONCEPTUAL TRANSPORT MODEL	75
3.1 Source Term and Release Parameters	76
3.1.1 Radionuclide Source Term	76
3.1.1.1 Radioactivity Observed in Cannikin Cavity Water	77
3.1.2 Release Functions	78
3.1.2.1 Volume/Surface Mode Designation	80
3.1.2.2 Release Rate	82
3.2 Retardation	85
3.2.1 Assignment of Distribution Coefficient	87
3.2.2 Calculation of Retardation Factor	88
3.2.3 Matrix Diffusion	89
3.3 Solving the Contaminant Transport Problem	90
4. PARAMETRIC UNCERTAINTY ANALYSIS	97
4.1 Sensitivity/Uncertainty Analysis of Flow Parameters	97
4.1.1 Numerical Approach for the Parametric Uncertainty Analysis	100
4.1.2 Sensitivity of Concentration and Head Distributions to Flow Parameter Uncertainty	101
4.2 Sensitivity/Uncertainty Analysis of Transport Parameters	104
4.3 Results of the Parametric Uncertainty Analysis	111
5. FLOW AND TRANSPORT MODELING RESULTS	117
5.1 Milrow Flow and Transport Results	117
5.1.1 Undecayed Breakthrough Curves	123
5.1.2 Breakthrough with Radioactive Decay	136
5.1.3 Milrow Summary and Discussion	141
5.2 Long Shot Flow and Transport Results	142
5.2.1 Undecayed Transport Results	147
5.2.2 Transport Results with Radioactive Decay	150
5.2.3 Long Shot Summary and Discussion	155
5.3 Cannikin Flow and Transport Results	155
5.3.1 Undecayed Transport Results	161
5.3.2 Transport Results with Radioactive Decay	164
5.3.3 Summary and Discussion	170
6. SENSITIVITY STUDIES	171
6.1 Two-dimensional Sensitivity Studies	171
6.1.1 Numerical Solution Issues	171
6.1.2 Matrix Diffusion Coefficient	176
6.1.3 Colloid Transport	187
6.1.4 Transient Responses to Sea Level Change	192
6.1.5 Island Half-Width	197

6.1.6 Geothermal Heat	201
6.2 Three-Dimensional Sensitivity Studies	205
6.2.1 Flow in the Rubble Chimney	207
6.2.2 Cannikin Lake	216
6.2.3 Heat Derived from Nuclear Test	218
6.2.4 Three-dimensional Formulation - Flow with Fault Zones	227
7.0 Summary and Conclusions	237
REFERENCES	241
APPENDIX: Modeling the Transport of Reactive and Non-Reactive Solutes in Cores from the Cannikin Test Site, Amchitka Island, Alaska	A-1
APPENDIX: Glass Dissolution Solution	B-1
APPENDIX: Modeling the Transport of Reactive and Non-Reactive Solutes in Cores from the Cannikin Test Site, Amchitka Island, Alaska	C-1

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1.	Location map showing Amchitka Island in the Aleutian Island chain.	4
1.2.	Locations and topography of Amchitka Island.	5
1.3.	Average total monthly precipitation at Amchitka Island	6
1.4	Location map showing the exploratory locations for the Supplemental Test Site Program (letters B through F) and boreholes	7
1.5	Schematic cross section of the Milrow test and relevant features, scale approximate.	8
1.6.	Location map showing wells and boreholes in the immediate vicinity of Milrow. ...	9
1.7.	Schematic cross section of the Long Shot test and pertinent features, scale approximate.	10
1.8.	Location map showing wells and boreholes in the immediate vicinity of Long Shot.	11
1.9.	Schematic cross section of the Cannikin test and relevant features, scale approximate.	12
1.10.	White Alice Creek drainage basin after the Cannikin test.	13
1.11.	Geologic cross section along the long axis of Amchitka Island.	14
1.12.	Construction diagram, lithologic log and summary of hydraulic tests, holes UAe-2, UAe-1, EH-2 and EH-5, Amchitka Island, Alaska.	16
1.13.	Stratigraphic section encountered in the exploratory boreholes for the three test sites.	17
1.14.	Schematic map of underground testing areas showing major features and bathymetry.	19
1.15.	Saltwater intrusion beneath island aquifers.	21
1.16.	Head measurements at different wells as a function of elevation.	22
1.17	Water levels in shallow boreholes at the Long Shot site.	22
1.18.	Relative ion percentages for water samples from Amchitka.	25
1.19.	Chloride content at various depths at Milrow (UAe-2), Long Shot (EH-5), and Cannikin (UAe-1).	26
2.1.	Distribution of log10-transformed K values estimated from straddle packer test data collected from Amchitka boreholes.	41
2.2.	Variation with depth of hydraulic conductivity values obtained from packer tests. ...	42
2.3.	Variation of total porosity determined from laboratory tests on core samples.	44
2.4.	Plots of temperature profiles simulated using the groundwater recharge model compared to temperature profiles measured in the boreholes.	48
2.5	A lognormal fit to the recharge values obtained by the uncertainty analysis of the temperature logs.	49

2.6.	A finite-element mesh generated by FEFLOW for the modeled domain showing variable element size with fine resolution at the location of the transition zone.	54
2.7.	Location of model cross sections for each site.	56
2.8.	Finite-element modeling meshes generated for each site model domain.	57
2.9.	Topographic and bathymetric profiles used for each site-specific model.	58
2.10.	Geometry of simulation domain and boundary conditions for the flow problem.	59
2.11.	Concentration distribution showing transition zone (top) and velocity field as produced by FEFLOW for one of the Milrow calibration cases tested.	61
2.12.	Comparison between simulated and measured heads for eight cases of different conductivity, anisotropy ratio and recharge combinations for Milrow.	62
2.13.	Comparison between simulated and measured heads for a Milrow case that leads to a good match for concentrations only.	63
2.14.	Comparison between simulated and measured chloride concentrations for a case that gives the best match to Milrow concentration data.	64
2.15.	Comparison between simulated and measured heads for a case that leads to a good match for Milrow heads only.	65
2.16.	Comparison between simulated and measured chloride concentrations at Milrow for two cases of macrodispersivity.	66
2.17.	Long Shot calibration using concentration data at one well and head data at a number of wells clustered around the working point.	67
2.18.	Calibration results for Cannikin well UAe-1 where head and concentration data are compared to model results.	70
2.19.	Calibration results for Cannikin wells UA-1 and HTH-1 using head data.	71
2.20.	Transition zones modeled for each site using the calibration parameters, expressed by the chloride concentration.	72
2.21.	Velocity vectors for the calibrated flow fields at each site.	74
3.1.	Flow chart of the transport model source and processes considered.	75
3.2.	Tritium analyses for three sampling events in the Cannikin post-test hole, UA1-P-1.	79
3.3.	Dissolution function for nuclear melt glass, using the parameters described in the text and various values for the specific surface area.	85
3.4.	Release of particles by glass dissolution rate.	93
3.5.	Conceptualization of the transport processes and computation of mass flux across the seafloor.	94
4.1.	Randomly generated distributions for the parameters governing the solution to the flow problem.	98
4.2.	Finite-element mesh with the upper left half of the domain refined and chimney location highlighted.	100

4.3.	Sensitivity of UAe-2 concentration and heads to recharge in the first modeling stage.	102
4.4.	Sensitivity of UAe-2 concentration and heads to conductivity in the first modeling stage.	103
4.5.	Sensitivity of UAe-2 concentration and heads to porosity in the first modeling stage.	105
4.6.	Sensitivity of UAe-2 concentration and heads to macrodispersivity in the first modeling stage.	106
4.7.	Randomly generated distribution for the glass dissolution rate, kg (top), and the percentage of mass released as a function of time for the minimum, mean, and maximum kg (bottom).	107
4.8.	Randomly generated distribution for longitudinal local dispersivity for the first modeling stage.	109
4.9.	Randomly generated distribution for the matrix diffusion parameter, k (top), and the dependence of the retention function, g, on the value of k (bottom).	110
5.1.	Expanded view of the upper left portion of each model domain, showing the nuclear chimney included in the flow and transport simulations.	118
5.2.	Randomly generated distributions for Rech, K, and q in the second modeling stage for Milrow.	119
5.3.	Comparison of the randomly generated recharge-conductivity ratio and conductivity-porosity ratio in relation to the Milrow base-case values.	120
5.4.	Sensitivity of UAe-2 concentrations and heads to the combined uncertainties of Rech, K and q in the second Milrow modeling stage.	122
5.5.	Undecayed Milrow breakthrough curves for the first solute class with different matrix diffusion strengths (top) and for the six solute classes with k = 0.434 (bottom).	124
5.6.	Histograms of the percentage of Milrow mass that has broken through within 2,200 years.	126
5.7.	Velocity realizations for Milrow showing a circulatory pattern (top) and a non-circulatory pattern (bottom).	127
5.8.	Three snapshots of the particle distribution (plume shape) at different times for Milrow.	129
5.9.	Three snapshots of the particle distribution (plume shape) at different times for Milrow.	130
5.10.	Three snapshots of the particle distribution (plume shape) at different times for Milrow.	131
5.11.	Three snapshots of the particle distribution (plume shape) at different times for Milrow.	132
5.12.	Histograms showing the distribution of first arrival time, last arrival time, and duration of breakthrough for Milrow.	133
5.13.	Histograms showing the distance from groundwater divide to plume edges and plume width for Milrow.	134

5.14.	Histograms showing the distributions of depths below MSL at which the plume edges discharge to the ocean floor for Milrow.	135
5.15.	Statistics of mass flux and concentrations for ^3H with $k = 0.434$	138
5.16.	Statistics of mass flux and concentrations for ^{14}C with $k = 0.434$	139
5.17.	The effect of the release category (proportion of glass release) on breakthrough.	140
5.18.	Randomly generated distributions for Rech , K and q in the second (final) modeling stage.	143
5.19.	Comparison of the randomly generated recharge-conductivity and conductivity-porosity ratios relative to the base-case values.	144
5.20.	Sensitivity of modeled heads and concentrations to the combined uncertainties of Rech , K and q in the second modeling stage at Long Shot.	146
5.21.	Histograms showing the distribution of first arrival time, last arrival time, and duration of breakthrough for Long Shot.	148
5.22.	Histograms showing the distance from groundwater divide to plume edges and plume width for Long Shot.	149
5.23.	Histograms showing the distributions of depths below MSL at which the plume edges discharge to the ocean floor for Long Shot.	151
5.24.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^3H from Long Shot with $k = 0.434$	153
5.25.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^{14}C from Long Shot with $k = 0.434$	154
5.26.	Randomly generated distributions for Rech , K and q for the final Cannikin modeling stage.	157
5.27.	Comparison of the randomly generated recharge-conductivity and conductivity-porosity ratios relative to the Cannikin base-case values.	158
5.28.	Sensitivity of UAe-1 modeled concentrations and heads to the combined uncertainties of Rech , K and q in the final Cannikin modeling stage.	159
5.29.	Sensitivity of UA-1 and HTH-1 modeled heads to the combined uncertainties of Rech , K and q in the final Cannikin modeling stage.	160
5.30.	Histograms of the percentage of Cannikin mass that has broken through within 2,200 years.	162
5.31.	Histograms showing the distribution of first arrival time, last arrival time, and duration of breakthrough for Cannikin.	163
5.32.	Histograms showing the distance from groundwater divide to plume edges and plume width for Cannikin.	165
5.33.	Histograms showing the distributions of depths below MSL at which the plume edges discharge to the ocean floor for Cannikin.	166
5.34.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^3H from Cannikin with $k = 0.434$	167
5.35.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^{14}C from Cannikin with $k = 0.434$	168
6.1.	Comparison between original velocity streamlines, gridded (or interpolated) velocity streamlines and advective particle trajectory for the entire travel distance and two areas of inset.	172

6.2.	Comparison between original velocity streamlines, gridded (or interpolated) velocity streamlines and advective particle trajectory for the three areas of inset closest to the seafloor as shown in Figure 6.1.	173
6.3.	Comparison between bilinear and inverse-distance interpolation schemes and between these two traditional random walk techniques and the modified method of LaBolle et al. (2000) that avoids computing dispersion and porosity gradient terms.	175
6.4.	Comparison between bilinear and inverse-distance interpolation schemes and between these two traditional random walk techniques and the modified method of LaBolle et al. (2000) that avoids computing dispersion and porosity gradient terms.	177
6.5.	Undecayed breakthrough curves for the first solute class with different matrix diffusion strengths (top) and for the six solute classes with $k = 0.0434$ (bottom).	179
6.6.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^3H with $k = 0.0434$ at Milrow.	180
6.7.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^{14}C with $k = 0.0434$ at Milrow.	181
6.8.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^3H with $k = 0.0434$ at Long Shot.	183
6.9.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^{14}C with $k = 0.0434$ at Long Shot.	184
6.10.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^{151}Sm with $k = 4.117$ at Long Shot. ...	188
6.11.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^3H with $k = 0.0434$ at Cannikin.	189
6.12.	Statistics of mass flux and concentration for ^{14}C with $k = 0.0434$ at Cannikin.	190
6.13.	Results of simulating that five percent of the ^{151}Sm travels unretarded, simulating colloid-facilitated migration.	193
6.14.	Changes in the concentration and head profiles at the UAe-1 location in response to a rise in sea level from an assumed glacial condition at 30 m below present sea level.	195
6.15.	Changes in the head profiles at the UA-1 and HTH-1 locations in response to a rise in sea level from an assumed glacial condition at 30 m below present sea level.	196
6.16.	Variation in transition zone configuration for one realization of the Milrow model with the base-case island half-width (2,062 m) and 200 and 400 m wider.	198
6.17.	Variation in transition zone configuration for one realization of the Milrow model with the base-case island half-width (2,062 m) and 200 and 400 m shorter.	199
6.18.	Undecayed, non-retarded breakthrough curves for one realization of the Milrow model under conditions of varying island half-width. The base case is 2,062 m.	200
6.19.	Comparison of profiles of head, concentration and temperature simulated by the isothermal and geothermal models, and values measured at UAe-2.	203
6.20.	Comparison of velocity profiles along a vertical line through the working point of Milrow for isothermal and geothermal models.	204
6.21.	Comparison of mass breakthrough at the sea floor for non-decayed, unretarded, solutes under isothermal conditions and geothermal conditions.	205
6.22.	Selection of realizations for three-dimensional modeling.	206

6.23.	Salinity in the island groundwater system, expressed as concentration of chloride in mg/L, for the three realizations identified in Figure 6.22, as calculated in 2-D with the nuclear chimney included.	208
6.24.	Design of finite-element mesh used for the 3-D model of flow in the Cannikin cavity and rubble chimney. All vertical layers are 100 m wide.	209
6.25.	Salinity in the island groundwater system, expressed as concentration of chloride in mg/L, for the three select realizations, for the 3-D model including the nuclear chimney.	211
6.26.	Breakthrough of undecayed, non-retarded particles in 2-D and 3-D domains with both including a nuclear chimney. Each graph represents a different case of recharge/conductivity ratio.	212
6.27.	Salinity in the island groundwater system, expressed as concentration of chloride in mg/L, for the three sensitivity realizations in 3-D without incorporating the nuclear chimney.	213
6.28.	Particle trajectories for flow in the Cannikin domain with and without the nuclear chimney simulated, for 3-D realization #1.	214
6.29.	Breakthrough of undecayed, non-retarded, particles in a 3-D isothermal flow field with and without a nuclear chimney simulated.	215
6.30.	Design of finite-element mesh used for the 3-D model incorporating Cannikin Lake.	217
6.31.	Breakthrough of a non-decayed, unretarded, solute using the steady velocity fields generated from isothermal simulations with and without including Cannikin Lake above the chimney.	219
6.32.	Design of finite-element mesh used for the 3-D model incorporating heat derived from the Cannikin nuclear test. All vertical layers are 100 m wide.	220
6.33.	Variation of temperatures at selected points around the cavity and chimney, following addition of heat derived from the Cannikin test.	222
6.34.	Salinity in the island groundwater system, expressed as concentration of chloride in mg/L, for the three select realizations, for the 3-D model including the nuclear chimney and heat from the nuclear test.	224
6.35.	Particle trajectories from the Cannikin cavity with and without nuclear heat for realization #2 (cavity within the transition zone).	225
6.36.	Cross section view of particle trajectories from the Cannikin cavity with and without nuclear heat for realization #1 (transition zone above the cavity).	226
6.37.	Cross-section view of particle trajectories from the Cannikin cavity with and without nuclear heat for realization #3 (transition zone below the cavity).	226
6.38.	A vertical 2-D view of particle trajectories showing the looping pattern in the 3-D thermal model with nuclear heat.	227
6.39.	Breakthrough of undecayed, unretarded mass from a nuclear chimney with and without heat from the nuclear test.	228
6.40.	Design of finite-element mesh used for the the 3-D model incorporating fault zones near Cannikin.	230

6.41.	Profiles of concentrations and heads along a vertical line through the working point of Cannikin showing the effect of faults with K-ratio of 100.	231
6.42.	Profiles of concentrations and heads along a vertical line through the faults (at same x as the working point) showing the effect of faults with K-ratio of 100. ...	232
6.43.	Particle distributions comparing faulted and unfaulted scenarios for Cannikin 3-D model for selected realization #2.	234
6.44.	Plan view of particles' distribution for realization #3 showing the effects of faults when the transition zone is below the cavity.	235
6.45.	Breakthrough of undecayed, unretarded mass from Cannikin cavity with and without fault zones. Each graph represents a different case of recharge-conductivity ration for the three selected realizations.	236
7.1.	Cavity location relative to the expected transition zone profile for the three tests. ...	239

LIST OF TABLES

1.1.	Selected references for island-wide investigations and individual tests.	2
1.2.	Representative groundwater chemistry data from the three testing areas	24
1.3	Carbon-14 data for Amchitka groundwater samples.	27
2.1.	Summary of hydraulic data from straddle packer tests on Amchitka Island.	39
2.2.	Shallow hydraulic head data from the three testing areas.	43
2.3.	Boreholes used for estimates of groundwater recharge.	47
2.4.	Parameters used in FEFLOW to solve the isothermal density-driven flow problem. .	60
3.1.	List of radionuclides considered for the source term for Milrow, Long Shot, and Cannikin.	77
3.2.	Release ratios assigned to source term nuclides.	81
3.3.	Comparison between chemical composition of natural volcanic glass, nuclear melt glass, and bulk rock composition at the Amchitka testing intervals.	83
3.4.	Linear and Freundlich isotherm parameters for lead sorption.	87
3.5.	Assignment of sorption behavior to radionuclide source elements.	87
4.1a.	Results of the parametric uncertainty analysis for Milrow comparing the effects of different parameters on plume travel time and transverse location of the breakthrough.	112
4.1b.	Results of the matrix diffusion sensitivity modeling comparing the effects of different parameters on plume travel time and transverse location of the breakthrough when the matrix diffusion parameter, k , is 0.0434 rather than the base-case value of 0.434.	113
5.1	Parameter range for Milrow simulations.	121
5.2.	Values of parameters specific to individual solute classes.	123
5.3a.	Peaks of expected and standard deviation of mass flux and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Milrow source term.	137
5.3b.	Peaks of expected and standard deviation of concentration and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Milrow source term.	137
5.4	Parameter range for Long Shot simulations.	145
5.5	Values of parameters specific to individual solute classes.	147
5.6a.	Peaks of expected and standard deviation of mass flux and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Long Shot source term.	152
5.6b.	Peaks of expected and standard deviation of concentration and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Long Shot source term.	152
5.7	Parameter range for Cannikin flow and transport simulations.	156
5.8a.	Peaks of expected and standard deviation of mass flux and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Cannikin source term.	169

5.8b. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of concentration and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Cannikin source term.	169
6.1a. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of mass flux and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Milrow source term for the matrix diffusion sensitivity case of $k=0.0434$	182
6.1b. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of concentration and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Milrow source term for the matrix diffusion sensitivity case of $k=0.0434$	182
6.2a. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of mass flux and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Long Shot source term for the matrix diffusion sensitivity case of $k=0.0434$	185
6.2b. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of concentration and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Long Shot source term for the matrix diffusion sensitivity case of $k=0.0434$	186
6.3a. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of mass flux and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Cannikin source term for the matrix diffusion sensitivity case of $k=0.0434$	191
6.3b. Peaks of expected and standard deviation of concentration and the associated times and locations for radionuclides in the Cannikin source term for the matrix diffusion sensitivity case of $k=0.0434$	191
6.4. Values of parameters used in FEFLOW for simulations incorporating geothermal heat.	202
6.5. Values of parameters used in three-dimensional simulations incorporating the rubble chimney.	209
6.6. Values of parameters used in three-dimensional simulations incorporating heat derived from the Cannikin test.	221
6.7. Locations of selected points around the Cannikin cavity and chimney where temperatures are presented in Figure 6.33.	221
6.8. Values of parameters used in three-dimensional simulations incorporating fault zones.	229

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEC	Atomic Energy Commission
AMSL	above mean sea level
DRI	Desert Research Institute
DOE	Department of Energy
GUI	graphical user interface
GW	groundwater
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Association
MPC	maximum permissible concentration
MSL	mean sea level
NTS	Nevada Test Site
RSC	relative specific capacity
STS	Supplemental Test Site
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey

LIST OF SYMBOLS

A_{sp}	Specific surface area
A_L	Longitudinal macrodispersivity
A_T	Transverse macrodispersivity
b	Fracture half aperture
C	Radionuclide concentration
C_0	Initial concentration
c_s	Specific heat of rock
c_0	Specific heat of fluid
D^*	Effective diffusion coefficient
D_m^*	Effective diffusion coefficient in the matrix
D	Local hydrodynamic dispersion tensor
e	Anisotropy ratio
IAP	Ion activity product
K	Hydraulic conductivity
K_{xx}	Horizontal hydraulic conductivity
K_{zz}	Vertical hydraulic conductivity
K_T	Equilibrium constant
K_d	Distribution coefficient
K_a	Surface-based sorption constant
K_f	Freundlich isotherm parameter
k	Thermal conductivity
k_g	Glass dissolution rate
k_l	Linear rate constant
κ	Matrix diffusion parameter
M_0	Initial mass of radionuclides
n	Freundlich isotherm exponent
NP	Number of particles in the random walk simulations
NP'_G	Number of particles released via glass dissolution at time t
Q	Total solute mass flux
q	Point solute mass flux
R	Retardation factor in the fracture
R_c	Cavity radius
$Rech$	Recharge
R_m	Retardation factor in the matrix

S_s	Specific storage
t	Time
T	Temperature
\mathbf{V}	Velocity vector
α_L	Longitudinal local dispersivity
α_T	Transverse local dispersivity
β_L	Thermal longitudinal dispersivity
β_T	Thermal transverse dispersivity
Δt	Time step
Δx	Spatial grid size
γ	Retention function
λ	Decay rate
λ_s	Rock thermal conductivity
λ_0	Water thermal conductivity
μ	Undecayed moment
μ_d	Decayed moment
μ_0	Water viscosity
ω	Radionuclide's half life
ρ_0	Fluid density
σ	Standard deviation
θ	Fracture porosity
θ_m	Matrix porosity
z	Mass transfer of a chemical species into aqueous solution per unit surface area of solid